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December 6 2017 – January 5, 2018

INFORMATION

MEMORANDUM FOR THE WHITE HOUSE STAFF SECRETARY AND CABINET SECRETARY

FROM: Vivieca Wright Simpson, Chief of Staff

SUBJECT: Department of Veterans Affairs Weekly Update

(Blue Font = New Entries)

1. Department of Veterans Affairs 30-Day Policy Look Ahead

VA Secretary's Top Priorities

Greater Choice and Quality In Health Care for Veterans

VA is working to ensure Veterans have more options for care, including at VA Medical Centers (VAMC) or Health Care Systems (HCS), and care in the community when VAMCs do not meet their needs.

- December 7
- Dr. Peter Almenoff, Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) Director for Organizational Excellence, will brief **Congressman Salud Carbajal** on VA's **Strategic Analytics for Improvement and Learning Value Model** data.
- POC: Brooks Tucker, VA's Office of Legislative and Congressional Affairs

- December 8
- Margarita Devlin, VA's Benefits Assistance Service Director, will brief Senate Committee on Veterans Affairs (SVAC) staff on VA's efforts to **enroll service members transitioning** from active duty into **VA's health care system**.
- POC: Brooks Tucker, VA's Office of Legislative and Congressional Affairs

- December 11
- Mark Yow, Veterans Health Administration's (VHA) Chief financial Officer, will brief **House Committee on Veterans Affairs** (HVAC) minority staff on the **Veteran Integrated Service Network resource allocation process**.
- POC: Brooks Tucker, VA's Office of Legislative and Congressional Affairs

- December 12
- The Minneapolis VA HCS will hold a ribbon cutting and open house for VA's first **Center for Integrative Health and Healing**. Located in three large reconditioned rooms that were previously clinical spaces, the center will offer mindfulness, yoga,

tai-chi and acupuncture. After remarks from Minneapolis VA HCS Director Patrick Kelly, the center will open for tours and demonstrations.

- POC: Ralph Heussner, Minneapolis VA HCS Public Affairs
- [December 13](#)
- [Secretary Shulkin will meet with House Majority Leader Kevin McCarthy and Congressman Steve Knight to discuss an **immediate care pilot in Southern California**.](#)
- [POC: Brooks Tucker, VA's Office of Legislative and Congressional Affairs](#)
- December 18
- VA leaders will provide **SVAC staff** an update on VA Office of Inspector General's recommendations on the **Veterans Crisis Line (VCL)**, and VCL performance indicators.
- POC: Brooks Tucker, VA's Office of Legislative and Congressional Affairs

Improve Timeliness of Service – Disability Claims and Appeals Decisions

The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) is working to improve the timeliness of adjudicating and paying disability claims.

- December 6
- VBA leaders will brief congressional staffers on the **Decision Ready Claims** process and **Rapid Appeals Modernization Program**. Specific members/committees are TBD.
- POC: Brooks Tucker, VA's Office of Legislative and Congressional Affairs
- **VBA Claims Clinics** are outreach events where VBA employees provide Veterans with in-person support and guidance related to claims processing. Claims clinics differ from traditional outreach events in that VA claims personnel are available to discuss with Veterans their unique individual issues. Upcoming claims clinics are:
 - December 6: Jackson, MS
 - December 5 [and 19](#): Brunswick, ME
 - December 5-7: St. Louis, MO
 - December 9: Irvington, NJ
 - [December 13: Anthem, AZ](#)
 - [December 13-15: Winston-Salem, NC](#)
 - [December 14: Somerset County, NJ and St. Petersburg, FL](#)
 - [December 18: Mather, CA](#)
 - [December 19: Louisville, KY](#)
 - [December 20: Trenton, NJ](#)
 - [December 26: Portland, ME](#)
- POC: Tom Murphy, Acting Under Secretary for Benefits

Modernize VA Systems and Infrastructure

VA is working to modernize information technology, other systems and physical infrastructure to improve our delivery of care and services to Veterans.

- December 7
- VA's Office of Information and Technology will deliver upgrades to **how VA's National Cemetery Administration (NCA) coordinates with memorial benefits** for recently deceased Veterans. The upgrades will improve the security of Personally Identifiable Information – Sensitive data when NCA corresponds with next-of-kin and funeral homes to arrange memorial benefits. This will ensure more safeguards of Veterans' personal information and add peace of mind for families as their Veteran family members are appropriately honored for service to the nation at their final places of rest.
- POC: Scott Blackburn, VA's Office of Information and Technology

Other Department Priorities

Reducing Veteran Homelessness

VA is working to reduce or eliminate Veteran homelessness through internal programs and leveraging partnerships with public and private entities.

- POC for all events: A ^{(b) (6)} Acting Director for Veteran Homeless Programs
- December 8
- Leaders from VA's Pacific Island Health Care System will participate in a ribbon cutting ceremony at the **Enhanced Use Lease facility at Barbers Point, HI**. U.S. Vets, the organization currently leasing the VA property to provide supportive transitional housing for Veterans, has added 50 additional units to house Veterans who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. The Barbers Point location currently houses over 300 Veterans per year. The supportive services include providing access to VA healthcare, job placement programs, and other transition services.
- **Veteran Homeless Standdowns** are outreach events where VAMCs address the unique care needs of homeless Veterans. Events include health screenings, VA benefits counseling, and referrals for housing or employment assistance. Upcoming Homeless Standdowns are:
 - December 8: Newport, OR
 - December 12: [Brandon, FL](#)
 - December 14: Horseheads, NY
 - December 14-15: Seattle, WA
 - December 16: Dallas, TX
 - December 23-25: Yuma, AZ

Leveraging Partnerships

VA is committed to working with public and private entities who wish to improve outcomes for Veterans.

- December 7
- The Ralph H. Johnson VAMC and the Fisher House Foundation will host a grand opening and ribbon cutting ceremony for the opening of the new **Fisher House in Charleston, SC**. The new Fisher House will provide lodging for up to 16 families of eligible Veterans and active duty military members at no cost, allowing them to be near loved ones receiving care at the nearby Ralph H. Johnson VAMC. Dr. Carolyn Clancy, VHA Executive in Charge, and Ke (b) (6) er House Chairman and CEO, will make opening remarks.
- December 13
- Secretary Shulkin will meet w (b) (6) and the **Association of American Medical Colleges** to discuss VA legislation and other issues of importance to academic medicine, like joint ventures.

Building and Sustaining a Quality VA Workforce

VA is reshaping its workforce to one that is Veteran-centric and committed to improving care and services for Veterans. Efforts include engaging with employees at facilities in the field to communicate priorities on cultural change and accountability, as well as recognizing employees as key and valued stakeholders.

- December 21
- VBA will conduct graduation ceremonies for 109 Wounded Warriors and transitioning Servicemembers completing VBA's **Warrior Training Advancement Course (WARTAC)**. The program educates participants on the skillsets needed to serve as a Veterans Service Representative or Rating Veteran Service Representative in VBA, and allows the participants to complete the program while still on active duty. The in-person courses began in October at six military installations in California, Texas, and Germany, and consisted of instructor led training, web based instruction, scheduled tests, and completing mock claims. WARTAC graduates will then have an **opportunity to be interviewed for employment** at one of VBA's 56 Regional Offices in the country.
- POC: Tom Murphy, Acting Under Secretary for Benefits

2. Key Events for the Upcoming 30-Days

VA Advisory Committees

Supporting VA Priority: Engaging with Key Stakeholders

Via the Federal Advisory Committee Act, advisory committees operate as another component of the "people's voice" in our democratic form of government, and are comprised of experts from the public and private sector. Upcoming meetings are:

- December 6: The **National Research Advisory Council** provides advice to the Secretary on research and development sponsored and/or conducted by the Veterans Health Administration, to include policies and programs of the Office of Research and Development.

- December 6-7: The **VA National Academic Affiliations Council** provides advice to the Secretary regarding partnerships between VA and its academic affiliates.
- December 12-14: The **Advisory Committee on Minority Veterans** Committee provides advice to the Secretary on the administration of VA benefits for Veterans who are minority group members in the areas of compensation, health care, rehabilitation, outreach, and other services. Secretary Shulkin will meet with the committee during its first day of discussions. (b) (6) VA's Center for Minority Veterans Director, will serve as the Designated Federal Officer for the Advisory Committee.
- December 13: The **Cooperative Studies Scientific Evaluation Committee** provides advice on VA cooperative studies, multi-site clinical research activities, and policies related to managing these efforts. The Committee also ensures that all projects maintain high quality, are based upon scientific merit, and are efficiently and economically conducted.
- POC: (b) (6) A Advisory Committee Office

Veteran Town Halls

Supporting VA Priority: Engaging with Veterans

Veteran Town Halls are outreach events where local VA leaders invite Veterans, family members, congressional offices and community stakeholders, to learn about VA health care, services and benefits. Town Halls are usually conducted at VA Medical Centers (VAMC) or VA Health Care Systems (HCS), and they often include claims assistance from Veteran Benefits Regional Offices. Upcoming Town Halls are:

- POC: (b) (6) Veterans Health Administration Public Affairs
- December 6:
 - Ashville VAMC in Ashville, NC
 - Gulf Coast Veterans HCS in Pensacola, FL
 - Rochester VA Outpatient Clinic in Rochester, NY
- December 7:
 - William S. Middleton Veterans Hospital in Madison, WI
 - Minneapolis VA HCS in Forest Lake, MN
- [December 11: Erie VAMC in Erie, PA](#)
- December 12:
 - Roseburg VAMC in Roseburg, OR
 - Long Beach HCS in Long Beach, CA
 - Oscar G. Johnson VAMC at community locations in Wabeno, WI, Stephenson, MI, and Rapid River, MI
 - [Wilkes-Barre VAMC in Wilkes-Barre, PA](#)
- December 13:
 - Fargo HCS in Grafton, ND

Armstrong Outpatient Clinic in Kittanning, PA
VA Pittsburgh HCS in Pittsburgh, PA
VA Portland HCS in Vancouver, WA
Oscar G. Johnson VAMC at community locations in St Ignace, MI and
DeTour Village, MI
[Northern Arizona HCS in Anthem, AZ](#)

- December 14:
 - Canandaigua VAMC in Canandaigua, NY
 - Oscar G. Johnson VAMC at community locations in Sault Ste. Marie, MI, Newberry, MI, and Manistique, MI
- December 20: Milwaukee VA Medical Center in Milwaukee, WI
- December 21: Overton Brooks VAMC in Shreveport, LA
- December 28: Louis A. Johnson VAMC in Clarksburg, WV

VA's Center for Women Veterans (CWV)

Supporting VA Priority: Advancing Women Veterans Issues

- POC for all events: K ^{(b) (6)} [REDACTED] irector for VA's Center for Women Veterans
- December 12-13
- CWV Director Kayla Williams will speak at the **Defense Advisory Committee on Women in the Services (DACOWITS) meeting**. Ms. Williams, who is an ex-officio member, will update the Committee on the Secretary's priorities, current Federal initiatives addressing women Veterans, and benefits and services. Established in 1951 by then Secretary of Defense, George C. Marshall, the Committee consists of civilian women and men who are appointed by the Secretary of Defense to provide advice and recommendations on matters related to the recruitment and retention, treatment, employment, integration, and well-being of professional women in the Armed Forces. Historically, DACOWITS' recommendations have been very instrumental in effecting changes to laws and policies pertaining to military women.
- January 6
- CWV Director ^{(b) (6)} [REDACTED] will speak at the [Student Veterans of America 2018 National Conference](#) in San Antonio, Texas. The theme of the conference is "Defining Our Future." Ms. Williams will speak about "Resources to Boost Women Veterans' Career Readiness."

VA's Center For Minority Veterans (CMV)

Supporting VA Priority: Advancing Minority Veterans Issues

- POC: ^{(b) (6)} [REDACTED] Director of VA's Center for Minority Veterans
- December 5

Dwayne Campbell, VA's CMV Hispanic Veterans Liaison, will conduct a Lunch and Learn to educate veterans and employees at the Small Business Administration.

- December 6
Dwayne Campbell, VA's CMV Hispanic Veterans Liaison will attend the Congressional Hispanic Caucus Institute (CHCI) Holiday Reception at the Library of Congress.
- December 8
Ronald Sagudan, VA's CMV Asian American/Pacific Islander Veterans Liaison, will attend an event welcoming of Philippine Ambassador to the United States, Jose Manuel Romualdez.
- December 15
- (b) (6) MV Asian American/Pacific Islander Veterans Liaison, and (b) (6) MV Hispanic Veterans Liaison, will staff an information table for an **outreach event at Defense Intelligence Agency at Bolling Air Force Base.**
- December 15
- (b) (6) VA's CMV Hispanic Veterans Liaison, will attend the "Reach Out to Military Ministry" Christmas Holiday Gala hosted by Ebenizer AME Church.

Media Engagements

Supporting VA Priority: Engaging with Key Stakeholders

- POC for all events: L (b) (6) fice of Public Affairs
- December 11
- Secretary Shulkin will meet with **Benjamin Patton, the youngest son of General George Patton.** Mr. Patton will talk about the Patton Veterans Project, an innovative filmmaking program he developed as a therapeutic intervention for Veterans struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder, transition, and suicidal ideation.
- December 12
- Secretary Shulkin will participate in a live **Politico event at the Newseum.** Secretary Shulkin and a Politico reporter will discuss solutions-driven ideas around improving the physical and mental health of active duty Servicemembers and Veterans.

Engagements with Congress, Veterans Service Organizations, and Other Stakeholders

Supporting VA Priority: Engaging with Key Stakeholders

- December 6
- Secretary Shulkin will attend a **Cabinet Meeting** at the White House with other Cabinet Secretaries.

- December 6-7
- Deputy Secretary Bowman will travel to St. Louis, MO to provide keynote remarks at the **2017 National Veterans Small Business Event**. While in St. Louis, Deputy Secretary Bowman will conduct site visits at local facilities.
- December 7
- Secretary Shulkin will meet with C (b) (6) **Paralyzed Veterans of America** for a meet and greet.
- December 7
- Secretary Shulkin will meet with D (b) (6) **Concerned Veterans of America** for a meet and greet.
- December 7
- Secretary Shulkin will speak to the **2017-2018 Class of White House Fellows** as part of their speaker seminar series at the White House Fellows Luncheon.
- December 9
- Deputy Secretary Bowman will travel to Breckenridge, CO to accept the **Disabled Sports USA 2017 Dr. Robert Harney Leadership Award** on Behalf of the Department.
- December 9
- Secretary Shulkin will be in Philadelphia to attend the **Army Navy Football Game**.
- December 11
- Secretary Shulkin will meet with **Congressman Michael Turner** on Capitol Hill. They will discuss issues at the **Dayton VA Medical Center**.
- December 11
- Deputy Secretary Bowman and Anthony Kurta, Performing the Duties of Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, will co-chair the **VA/DoD Joint Executive Committee Meeting**. Topics will include: Purchased Care Network; Professional Health Care Services Contracts; Joint Sharing of Facilities and Services; VA Adoption of Defense Medical Logistics Standard Support; Telehealth Quick Wins; Military-to-Civilian Transition and Pre-Registration in VA Health Care; Movement of DoD Medical Personnel to work at VA; Joint Suicide Prevention; and Sexual Trauma – Section 402.
- December 12
- Secretary Shulkin will meet with executives from **Genoa Healthcare** to discuss mental health. Genoa is the Nation's largest mental health care pharmacy and the company also does medication management therapy and tele-psychiatric services.

- December 12
- Secretary Shulkin will participate in the **Association of American Retired Persons' (AARP) Caregiving Conference**. AARP is bringing together employers, tech innovators, medical providers, public officials, non-profits, and other leaders to talk about how to build a caregiver-friendly society and create a plan to make it reality. Several business leaders are expected to announce new commitments that their organizations are making to support family caregivers.
- December 12-13
- Deputy Secretary Bowman will travel to Augusta, ME to provide the keynote address at the first annual **State of Maine and VA Maine Veterans Symposium**. The theme of the symposium is suicide prevention and awareness, and the agenda will include panel and group discussions with Deputy Secretary Bowman on options available to Veterans who are in crisis. The State of Maine Bureau of Veterans' Services will live-stream many of the sessions for interested stakeholders who cannot attend.
- December 14
- Secretary Shulkin will meet with **VFW's Commander-in-Chief, Keith Harman**, for a meet and greet while he is in town. Bob Wallace, VFW's Executive Director, will also attend.
- December 15
- Secretary Shulkin will speak with former **Senator Bob Kerrey**. Senator Kerrey will brief Secretary Shulkin on the efforts of Virta Health to help Veterans. Virta Health is an enterprise whose goal is to reduce the number of Americans who are suffering from Type Two diabetes.
- December 18
- Secretary Shulkin will host a **breakfast** for leaders from Veterans Service Organizations.

***Note:** Unless noted otherwise, all events are in the Washington D.C. / Maryland / Virginia metro area.*

FREQUENTLY USED ACRONYMS:

CODEL – Congressional Delegation

DoD – Department of Defense

GAO – Government Accountability Office

HAC – House Appropriations Committee

IT – Information Technology

HCS – Health Care System

HVAC – House Veterans Affairs Committee

LGBT – Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender

MILCON/VA – Subcommittee on Military Construction Veterans Affairs and Related Agencies

NCA – National Cemetery Administration

OEF – Operation ENDURING FREEDOM

SVAC – Senate Veterans Affairs Committee

USH – Under Secretary for Health

VA – Veterans Affairs

VAMC – VA Medical Center

VBA – Veterans Benefits Administration

VHA – Veterans Health Administration

VISN – Veterans Integrated Service Network

4-Corners –HVAC and SVAC Chairman and Ranking Members